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ABSTRACT

A study was undertaken to determine if differences existed between Chicano and non-Chicano students enrolled in the college reading improvement program and if Chicano students evidenced any comprehension characteristics unique to them as a group which would justify special instructional programming. Of the 184 subjects selected for the study, 69 were Chicano. The Davis Reading Test Form 1A was used; it is an instrument which measures five types of comprehension, three of which--factual recall, main idea, and inference--were selected for measurement in this study. Results of the study showed that there are significant differences in reading comprehension between the two groups. Data showed no differences between Chicanos and non-Chicanos who were poor or average readers, but showed definite differences between Chicanos and non-Chicanos who were good readers. It was concluded that this difference was caused by inferential comprehension. (JM)

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Comprehension Characteristics
of Chicano and Non-Chicano Students
at Eastern New Mexico University

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For those teaching in college reading improvement programs
(CRIP) there is more than frequent concern with the comprehension
characteristics of students. Comprehension skills provide a major
means of access to knowledge which are essential to mastery of
academic programs. Of concern to instructors is the need to know
what particular strengths and weaknesses exist within a variety
of comprehension skills evidenced by individuals so that more

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effective instruction may be implemented. This is particularly true in developing reading programs for minority students. Of concern to those writing federal proposals is a growing need to present empirical data which reflect the reading characteristics of targeted populations who will be the focal point of monies received from this source. Davis (1972) and Haase (1973) have both dealt with factorial analysis in reading comprehension of adults. However, much of the available research does not provide knowledge about the reading comprehension characteristics of selected minorities at the adult level.

The "open door" admissions policy adopted by many institutions is directly related to these concerns. Within recent years we have seen a marked increase in the number of minority students entering institutions of higher learning with three distinct groups emerging - Native Americans, Blacks, and Mexican Americans (Chicanos). There are indications that reading comprehension skills of students from these groups are of such quality that prediction for success in academic programs is doubtful at best. In the absence of evidence, it is not unusual to hear claims that selected minorities have reading characteristics that are unique to that group. Such claims may be the sole justification both for the funding and organization of a CRIP for minorities which all too frequently result in outcomes of questionable value in the improvement of

reading skills. To researchers, instructors, and writers of proposals there has developed a need to know if comprehension characteristics unique to selected minorities do exist and in what ways are they different. Unfortunately, there are limitations in appropriating the available knowledge to local situations. In addition, there are extremes within cultural groups that make the application of generalizations from research rather questionable. It would seem logical, therefore, that institutions develop studies which are first appropriate for local needs and second, useful for institutions whose CRIP's are similar.

The Reading Center at Eastern New Mexico University recently completed one phase of a longitudinal study whose purpose was to determine if differences did exist between Chicano and Non-Chicano students enrolled in the University's CRIP. The primary purpose of the study was to determine if Chicano students evidenced any comprehension characteristics unique to them as a group which would justify special instructional programming. A secondary purpose was to develop empirical information useful for writing federal proposals. The purpose of this paper is to present the findings of this study to those for whom the results might be of interest.

POPULATION

The CRIP at Eastern New Mexico University, like many others, has had to deal directly with assimilating three minority groups

into its academic program. All classes are on an "open enrollment" basis and instruction has been aimed toward three ability groups within each class. There were 184 subjects selected for the study of whom 69 were Chicano and 115 were Non-Chicano. The period of the study included those students enrolled during the 1969-73 academic years.

The population represented a simple dichotomy - Chicano and Non-Chicano. The rationale for studying Chicanos first was both simple and practical. In simplicity they represented the most easily identifiable group; having more common characteristics, being larger in number, and from a more limited geographic region which would make generalizations safer. In practicality they are the larger group of a targeted population toward which federal funds are directed. The small number of Native Americans at Eastern represent numerous tribal languages and cultures, while the few Blacks come from diverse parts of the United States.

For inclusion in the Chicano group subjects had to meet the following criteria: 1) Spanish surname, 2) come from home in which Spanish was spoken, 3) classified as bilingual either by speaking Spanish or able to understand it through listening. The means for determining these criteria was through random interviews, questionnaires, and information obtained from personal data sheets. It should be noted that for the purposes of identifying Chicanos at

ENMU, the U. S. Office of HEW accepts one criteria - Spanish surname. For inclusion in the Non-Chicano group subjects had to come from Anglo American, Black, and Native American groups. Foreign students enrolled in the reading program were not included and no distinction was made between males and females in either group.

INSTRUMENTS OF MEASURE

Three types of reading skills were identified for measuring comprehension - factual recall, main idea, and inference. The Davis Reading Test Form 1A was used as it is an instrument which measures five types of comprehension, three of which were selected for measurement in this study. This test was administered to the subjects of the study at the beginning of instruction and is an 80-item test from which two scores are derived; 1-40 measuring Level of Comprehension and 1-80 Speed of Comprehension. Thirty items of the Level of Comprehension were selected which included factual recall, 6 items; central thought, 11 items; and inference, 13 items. Scores were tabulated from each student's answer sheet so that four measures would be obtained - one for each type of comprehension in addition to a total score.

PROCEDURE

The information derived from this study was based on a procedure called incidental sampling. Guilford and Fruchter (1973) describe this as appropriating samples that are taken from a population

because they are the ones most available. Such a procedure does not require assumptions to be made about the population in question when observing a particular behavior within a group. All scores were converted into proportions and applied to a Z ratio for determining differences between uncorrelated proportions with populations of differing size. The .01 significance level was selected as the critical value of acceptance.

Prior to the application of the Z test it was decided that results of the study would have greater credibility if it were determined that there was relative balance from high to low total scores within the population. Three ranges of scores were arbitrarily identified which would correspond to percentile ranges taken from the tables of the test manual. The raw-score ranges were 0-14, 15-20, and 21-30. The corresponding percentiles for these range scores were 1-21, 27-49, and 54-90 respectively. (By taking 30 of a 40-item test the 91-99 percentiles would necessarily be omitted.) The three divisions were then labeled as Poor, Average, and Good Readers. Based on their total raw scores the 184 subjects were then assigned to a particular category with the following results: Poor, 60; Average, 64; Good, 60. A chi square test revealed no significant differences among the three groups. This procedure determined that there was close approximation to a normal distribution among the three subgroups of the total population.

RESULTS

The statistical treatment answered two straight-forward questions about the two populations. Question one asked if there were significant differences between Chicanos and Non-Chicanos in four measures - total reading, factual recall, central thought, and inference. With a value of 2.58 critical at the .01 level in a two-tail test the following $\bar{Z}$ ratios were obtained: total reading, 7.12; factual recall, 4.01; central thought, 2.79; and inference, 5.57. Each of these four ratios exceeded the critical level of significance.

Question two asked if there were significant differences between Chicanos and Non-Chicanos within subcategories of Poor, Average, and Good Readers when taking into consideration four measures of reading. Between Poor Chicanos and Poor Non-Chicanos as well as between Average Chicanos and Average Non-Chicanos no $\bar{Z}$ ratios reached the critical value of 2.58 in measures of total reading, factual recall, central thought, and inference. Between Good Chicanos and Good Non-Chicanos $\bar{Z}$ ratios exceeded the 2.58 value in total reading and inference with ratios of 2.89 and 3.01 respectively. No ratios reached significance in factual recall and central thought.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study has been to determine if a selected ethnic group evidenced any special comprehension characteristics unique to them as a group. Presumably any characteristics revealed

could form the basis for the organization of reading programs more sensitive to ethnic needs. Based on the results of the study it appears that global generalizations are accurate which purport that significant differences in reading comprehension exist between Chicano and Non-Chicano students. For those responsible for the organization of a CRIP, it is not enough to know that differences exist; rather, it is necessary to know in which subcategories of readers differences appear and which specific comprehension skills contribute to these differences. When identified according to subcategories of readers the data suggest no differences between Poor and Average Readers between Chicanos and Non-Chicanos. Differences become evident between Good Chicanos and Non-Chicanos in total reading with this factor caused by inference comprehension. In summary, this study suggests that differences between Chicano and Non-Chicano students enrolled in a CRIP are very real, but that these differences are seen only when one examines reading comprehension scores according to a classification of readers and types of comprehension.

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